

California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley

Telecommunications / San Joaquin Valley/Rural Areas

Background

There is universal agreement among economic developers, businesses and investors that high speed broadband telecommunications access is an essential part of doing business and accessing services in the 21st century. The global market, information dissemination, education, health care and governmental emergency notification procedures increasingly rely on high speed access. In spite of great progress and rapid deployment in some areas affordable high speed broadband service is not universally available in all areas of the region. Rural communities and isolated areas are especially underserved.

Barriers to use exist even in areas which do have access. Training and education in computer and internet use and opportunities, are an integral part of improving the benefits of access for economic renewal and educational attainment.

Communities without high speed broad band access will remain economic, social and educational backwaters. Individuals without internet access and skills are denied opportunities and tools for advancement which, in many cases, cannot be replicated in other ways.

Currently available data does not accurately portray the availability of broadband service. The California Public Utilities Commission, in its recent report, published a map that shows broadband access by zip code, and based on the data in the map, one might conclude that access was available in virtually all areas of the state. The flaw in the data is that particularly in rural areas, zip codes cover large areas with sometimes sparse populations, and so while a city like Tulare might have broadband access, the community of Pixley, (pop.2500), just 20 miles away is without public access, though they are both in the same zip code.

Goal:

The purpose before the task force is two fold:

- A) Expedite the provision of high speed broadband access in all areas of the San Joaquin Valley
- B) Promote greater utilization of broadband in targeted populations and communities that currently trail the state average

Surveys taken by the Public Policy Institute of California show a clear digital divide within regions and populations in California. The more rural the community, the less access; the less Anglo and less affluent the community, the lower the use of the internet even if access does exist. Community Technology Centers and other public access sites provide some assistance in some communities but the amount of training and support,

especially in rural areas is inadequate. The ability of the region to prosper economically depends on educational literacy, and increasingly on the technological literacy of all segments of the population.

Existing Resources and Publications

Several groups and organizations have identified the need for universal access to high speed broadband in all of California, in order to match the kind of commitment that is being made in other states and nations. California's competitive advantage is quickly eroded if the workforce and the potential workforce are not keeping up with the global information and communication economy. There is a growing demand for the creation of a California Broadband Task Force.

Based on work done to increase the use of technology in the Great Central Valley (Redding to Bakersfield), the Great Valley Center began to call for universal access as early as 2003. In August of 2004, GVC hosted a summit of providers, rural representatives and regulators, and developed a set of recommendations for State and federal actions that have been referred to both the California Public Utilities Commission and to the Federal Communications Commission. Those recommendations are now part of the CPUC record, and were considered in the report, "Broadband Deployment in California" issued by the Commission in May of 2005. In late 2004 and early 2005, the California Center for Regional Leadership facilitated Rural Economic Vitality Conversations in eleven locations throughout the state, including in the Valley, and the need for high speed access was a consistent priority during those meetings.

In May of 2005, Secretary Sunne McPeak created an ad hoc task force, headed by Barbara Johnston, of the California Telemedicine and eHealth Center, to develop a specific proposal for the implementation of high speed broadband in rural areas, using telemedicine and eHealth as the pathfinder application. That Task Force is on schedule to produce a report and recommendations by the fall of 2005. This report will recommend investment and incentive policies to expand broadband services throughout the state to allow more Californians to benefit from telemedicine and eLearning activities in addition to other applications.

San Joaquin Valley Focus

In spite of the statewide need for ubiquitous access, the opportunity and the need exists to develop a program to provide access and increase use within the underserved San Joaquin Valley. There is an opportunity to initiate and test a California model in a geographic area that is relatively free from physical barriers, and is small enough to be achievable.

Workplan

- Work with the CPUC to develop accurate maps that reflect the actual existence of high speed broadband access based on actual deployment, rather than on more general jurisdictional definitions by March 2006.
- Working with providers and the CPUC, develop an action plan to provide at least one mode (wire, wireless, satellite or cable) of affordable, universal high speed broadband

access to all unserved areas of the San Joaquin Valley by January, 2007. The AD Hoc Task Force on Rural Telecommunications will complete its report in the fall of 2005, and the Partnership should review and consider adopting the recommendations that are applicable and relevant to the San Joaquin Valley.

- To ensure that all graduating students have at least a degree of technical proficiency, the Partnership should develop Technology Literacy Standards for High school graduation, and recommend them to all high schools and school districts within the region.
- The Partnership should identify innovative models that are replicable in communities throughout the region to provide public access and innovative community development programs using technology applications by June 2006.
- The Partnership should identify and or create business services that can be used to strengthen and grow home based businesses in rural areas, in order to increase the demand side of telecommunications access, and grow small businesses in rural areas to increase wealth and provide job by June 2006.

The Telecommunications Task Force of the Partnership will be supported by the Great Valley Center, and will coordinate with CPUC, the San Joaquin Valley Broadband Task Force, advocates, providers and user groups, and the California Broadband Taskforce once it is created.

Available publications:

- GVC Rural Telecommunications Summit
- Rural Economic Vitality Conversation (CCRL)
- Broadband Deployment in California (CPUC)